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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, January 15, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture.

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If you are interested in lending a hand to help our native birds and other wildlife survive the winter, here's news for you in today's letter from our correspondent in Washington, D. C.

She writes: "Men in the Bureau of Biological Survey, whose job for many years has been studying our native wild birds and mammals in order to know how best to conserve them, say that midwinter is a very tough time for the birds that don't fly South and for many wild mammals, too. Right now, perhaps within a stone's throw of your home, a good many creatures may be in distress. Each year, when the stormy season sets in, upland game birds, song birds, rabbits, and other small animals, even some big-game animals perish for lack of food and shelter. With the leaves gone from the woods and thickets, so many plants dead, and most of their natural food supply dead or covered by snow, they are in serious trouble. Even those familiar friends that do so much toward keeping down the insects on your property in summer -- the downy woodpeckers, nuthatches, and creepers -- may be suffering.

"Lack of food is the worst trouble. Starvation makes both birds and mammals susceptible to diseases they could resist if they were well-nourished. And starvation makes them too weak to escape from their enemies. The Survey men find that game birds, for example, rarely if ever die from exposure, even in the most severe weather, if they are well fed. You see, food keeps them warm. And if they have plenty of food and good cover, they have little trouble from natural enemies. So food is of the greatest importance when cold, sleet, snow, and blizzards make existence difficult. And this is the season when man can come to their rescue. The best way to do it, the Survey men say, is through an organized campaign that will supply regular feeding in such a way that the wildlife can make the most of it.

"The men who have made a special study of the food habits of birds say that the chief natural winter menu of upland game and other land birds includes weed seeds, dried fruits, and berries, and, to some extent, buds and some green leaves that last through the winter. The ruffed grouse and other birds with an appetite for buds can get along if they are near plenty of aspen, birch, and alder trees. Winter greens for bird-menus may come from the little plant called partridgeberry, or from chickweed or white clover that stands up in protected places, or even from wintergreen. Acorns, beechnuts, and hazlenuts help out as long as they last. And fruits include the berries that will hang during the winter -- juniper, chokeberry, sumac, holly, Virginia creeper,

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privet, cranberrybush, sour gum, bearberry, and snowberry. The seeds most available at this season are those from the pines or other conifers, from birch, alder, black locust, box elder, and poplar, as well as ragweed.

"Unfortunately, on too few farms is the supply of all these foods put together enough to carry the birds through the winter. And many farms are practically barren of any natural food that would be of use to wildlife. Dried fruits, nuts, and berries are scarce on most farms, and what there are so often are covered up out of the birds' reach or too far from protective cover. So the greatest boon at this season is a large hedgerow of plants that will provide both cover and wild fruit and seeds.

"As for feeding stations, the Survey men find that some of the best are all-winter feed patches and permanent shelter to hold grain. But in emergencies food can be put out wherever the birds will find it -- in haystacks, pits dug in the snow, or in any natural windbreak or shelter.

"In planning feeding stations remember that they need to be sheltered from drifting snow, wind and sleet and built so that they do not cut off the birds' flight in any direction. Some feeding stations have proved to be traps where dogs, cats, and goshawks or other enemies could corner the birds.

"The Survey men have found that simple natural feeding stations are best of all. They say that there is no more effective provision for winter feeding than standing or shocked corn left in fields near cover. And they say standing unhusked corn is perhaps the ideal source of winter food for game birds. Buckwheat left standing or in piled sheaves is another good food for game. Gamebirds and songbirds both will be grateful for wheat, rye, or barley left standing. Bobwhites and scaled quail will thrive on sorghums. Most game birds find soybeans a great delicacy. And sunflower seeds tempt blackbirds, goldfinches, crossbills, cardinals, and other small birds.

"Whatever food you offer, helpful feeding means regular feeding throughout the critical period, not just a meal once or twice. And it also means offering the food in a safe place and making sure it is not covered with snow before the birds can use it.

"As for feeding rabbits, squirrels and other animals in winter -- but there. I'm not going into that now. Instead I am sending you a copy of a new bulletin, just published, called 'Feeding Wildlife in Winter.'"

That concludes the letter, listeners. But let me add that this new bulletin is free as long as the supply lasts. And you can have it by writing to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. The name is: "Feeding Wildlife in Winter." And it is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1783.
